

Court-Backed Wiretaps Rise In Area in 1970, Study Shows

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Use of court-authorized wiretaps and electronic surveillance in criminal cases in Washington and surrounding Maryland counties expanded sharply in 1970 over 1969, a report to Congress from the administrative office of the U.S. courts shows.

The increased local use of wiretaps and other listening devices mirrored national figures in the report, which was required under the 1968 Omnibus Crime Act.

Nationally, the number of instances in which law enforcement authorities were authorized to use electronic surveillance, including wiretaps, rose to 597 in 1970 from 304 in 1969.

The total includes authorizations made by federal courts and state courts — in those states that have wiretap laws in criminal cases, but doesn't include taps and bugs used in connection with national security cases.

The report showed nine instances of court-ordered wiretaps in 1970 in the District of Columbia compared with two in 1969. All the 1970 cases were related to narcotics or gambling, the report indicated, and seven were related to arrests made during the year.

Maryland Increase

In Maryland, there were 28 authorizations last year, up from 16 in 1969. Of the 1970 authorizations, four were from federal courts and 24 from state courts.

In 1970, Maryland state courts authorized 10 phone taps in Prince George's

County and six in Montgomery County, compared with five for Prince Georges' and none for Montgomery in 1969. All but two of the 1970 cases in the two counties involved gambling.

The report showed one federally authorized wiretap in Virginia in 1970—a gambling case—and none in 1969. Virginia law doesn't give state courts the power to authorize wiretaps.

Speaking on the Senate floor earlier this week Sen. John L. McClellan (D-Ark.) said that his Criminal Laws and Procedures Subcommittee would begin a study of state and federal wiretapping and other electronic surveillance procedures, with hearings probably to be scheduled this fall.

Report Disproves Fear

But McClellan said that the report proved wrong those who had predicted "widespread and promiscuous use of wiretaps and bugs by law enforcement authorities; they said it was neither effective, nor highly productive; now they are being made to eat their words."

The report doesn't identify the specific cases in which each authorization applies.

It includes extensive information, however, on the number of conversations overheard and the cost of setting up and monitoring the taps.

The most expensive D.C. tap, in narcotics case, cost \$56,500. Law enforcement agents listened to a telephone for 31 days and monitored 385 conversations involving 23 persons. Of these, 136 conversations were "incriminating," according to the report, and 22

persons eventually were arrested.

The nine D.C. cases cost approximately \$150,000, most of it in pay for the personnel manning the taps, who listened to a total of 2,832 conversations that involved about 400 people.